

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend the paragraph on page 1 beginning on line 26 and ending on line 32 as follows:

B1 Examples of large-scale on-line gaming include Ultima Online (~~http://www.ue.com/visitor/~~) and Everquest (~~a division of Sony~~ ~~http://www.station.sony.com/everquest~~), both of which have their roots in "Dungeons and Dragons" style adventure games. Everquest has over 300,000 subscribers at US\$119 per year, and the game has peaked at over 60,000 players simultaneously on-line.

Please amend the paragraph on page 6 beginning on line 10 and ending on line 12 as follows:

B2 Figure 1 is a flowchart showing the steps involved in a method of interconnecting a plurality of gamers via a communications network, in accordance with the invention; and

Please amend the paragraph on page 6 beginning on line 14 and ending on line 17 as follows:

B3 Figure 2 is a schematic of a plurality of client computers connected via the internet to an on-line gaming server, configured and programmed to implement the method shown in Figure 1; and

Please add a new paragraph on page 6 after line 17 as follows:

B4 Figures 3 and 4 are schematic diagrams of different embodiments of physical tokens.

Please amend the paragraph on page 7 beginning on line 21 and ending on line 29 as follows:

B5 In use, a user purchases a physical token that has key data associated with it. In the preferred form of the invention, token takes the form of a card 204 (Figure 3) having printed upon it an access code 206. When purchased, the access code is covered by an opaque adhesive film 208 or a layer that can be scratched away with a coin or other edged object. To prevent tampering with, or fraudulent use of, the access code, the card 204 is sold in a sealed bag that is opened by the user prior to revealing the access code.

Please amend the paragraph on page 8 beginning on line 5 and ending on line 18 as follows:

B6 In other embodiments, the key data (or the access code associated with the key data) is stored in non-volatile memory 210 (Figure 4), such as a flash card, smart card, CD-ROM, DVD or the like. In the case of a CD-ROM or DVD being employed, it is particularly preferred that the CD-ROM or DVD be roughly rectangular and about the size of a business card. Alternatively, the token can take other shapes, perhaps related to the specific game for which the token is to be used. For example, if the game is a car racing game, the token can be in the silhouette of a sports car. Usually, graphics indicative of the game for which the token is to be used, and other information such as starting instructions, are printed or otherwise applied to at least one face of the token.

Please amend the paragraph bridging pages 8 and 9 as follows:

Assuming that the user's terminal is logged on to the internet (whether via phone lines or an intermediate network such as a LAN or WAN) and that suitable browsing software is loaded, the user visits the site at which the game to be played is located, or at least through which it is accessible. The gaming software running on the server requests the user's access code, which is input via the keyboard (step S1, Figure 1). For extra security, the user can be given the option of registering the access code, such that an extra password is required to access the site. It will also be appreciated that the token can include auto-start information that automatically takes the user to the correct site. In a preferred embodiment of this version, the auto-start routine encoded on the token also ~~supplied~~ supplies the key data to the server.

Please amend the paragraph on page 9 beginning on line 4 and ending on line 8 as follows:

Once the key data associated with the user's physical token is verified to ensure it is genuine (step S2, Figure 1), characteristics data associated with the physical token are associated with that user (step S3, Figure 1). This can be done explicitly, by storing the characteristics data on the gaming server.

Please amend the paragraph on page 9 beginning on line 10 and ending on line 20 as follows:

The type of characteristics data associated with the key data will depend upon the type of game running on the gaming server, and a number of other subjective factors. For example, if the game is an adventure or role-playing game, the characteristics data can

89 include such values as the player's initial health value, strength, number of player lives, identity, weaponry or the like. This characteristics data 211 can be stored remotely on the gaming server (Figure 2) and associated with particular key data, or in an alternative embodiment, can be stored on the card itself in non-volatile memory 212 (Figure 4) (such as flash memory, a smart card, or a writable CD-ROM or DVD).

Please amend the paragraph bridging pages 9 and 10 as follows:

10 The means (214) for generating the characteristics data can also be stored on the physical token in the form of computer software. For example, if the physical token is a CD-ROM or DVD disk, a relatively small program containing an interface for character generation or modification can be provided. So, if the physical token purchased is of a "Sorcerer" character class, then the particular characteristics of the character, including name and skills, can be modified by way of the interface software on the CD-ROM or DVD.

Please amend the paragraph on page 10 beginning on line 9 and ending on line 19 as follows:

11 The resultant character, whether entirely pre-generated, generated by the user from scratch, or some combination of the two, can be stored in any number of ways. For example, the gaming server can store a copy of the character data. This is particularly convenient because the user can then access the data from any terminal. Other alternatives include storing the characteristics data locally on the user's terminal or in non-volatile memory (212) on the physical token. Each of these different means for storing the

811 characteristics data has advantages and disadvantages that will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

Please amend the last paragraph on page 10 beginning on line 21 and ending on line 31 as follows:

812 Once the user's character is generated, the game running on the gaming server can be accessed (step S4, Figure 1). The particular type of game will vary from embodiment to embodiment. For example, in the case of the adventure or role-playing game, the user might have to wait until a new level is reached by other players in a particular game. Typically in such cases, multiple games will be in progress at any one time, so the user shouldn't need to wait long. Also, there may be restrictions on the games themselves, to prevent players whose characters are, for example, too experienced or powerful from gaining an unfair competitive advantage over other players.

Please amend the paragraph on page 11 beginning on line 7 and ending on line 13 as follows:

813 Once in the game, the players interact with each other and game features in any of the usual ways such games are played (step S5, Figure 1). This will involve the players inputting data indicative of their choices, conversing with other players, and otherwise interacting with the gaming software running on the gaming server, and with the actions of other users participating in the game.

Please add a new paragraph on page 11 after line 13 as follows:

B14 The characteristics data represent initial values 220 which are updated at the gaming server as the user plays the game.

Please amend the paragraph on page 11 beginning on line 15 and ending on line 19 as follows:

B15 The game is, however, competitive, and the aim of the game is to win based on some predetermined criterion. For example, points may be allocated for successful fighting, completion of set tasks, acquisition of certain items, or adhering to certain behaviour types, such as class-related behaviours (step S5a, Figure 1).

Please amend the last paragraph on page 11 beginning on line 21 and ending on line 30 as follows:

B16 Once the predetermined circumstances arise, one or more winners are determined based on performance within the game (step S6, Figure 1). The appropriate time at which to determine the winners can be, for example, after a predetermined period of play, after a predetermined score has been reached by one or more of the players or once a gaming target (such as a quest finishing) has been achieved. As noted above, in the preferred form there is a points bias towards higher levels and more difficult tasks, designed to make it more difficult to a player to win without taking on higher levels.

Please amend the first paragraph on page 12 as follows:

B17 The winner or winners are allocated prizes in accordance with the rules of the game (step S7, Figure 1). The prizes can range from cash, to products or services, through to

B17 prizes related to the game itself, such as merchandising or additional time/lives or characteristics for the winner's character.

Please amend the paragraph on page 12 beginning on line 17 and ending on line 26 as follows:

B18 It will also be appreciated that different levels and types of physical tokens can be purchased by users. For example, a more expensive type of card may offer a user a more powerful character, or more time, depending upon the type of game being played. In such a case (and in the spirit of fair gaming) the player will enter the game with players of at least approximately equivalent character attributes and power. This occurs ~~irrespective~~ irrespective of those other players having successfully played to have achieved such a level or having purchased a similar "superior" card.

Please amend the first paragraph on page 13 as follows:

B19 In a similar vein, in one embodiment, players can re-enter a game after all of their lives or health have been used up by purchasing another token and re-registering with the same game within a set time period forming part of the player data. The time period TP can be varied depending upon the intended duration the particular level or game, and can be anything from a few hours to many days or even weeks in duration. The preferred duration is 72 hours, since it is believed this provides a good compromise between encouraging users to go out and buy another card whilst the game is still fresh and exciting in their minds, without placing the user under unduly heavy time restraints for doing so.

Please amend the paragraph bridging pages 14 and 15 as follows:

B20 In an alternative preferred embodiment, the invention is configured to enable user access to interactive gaming on a remote server via a computer terminal. In this case, a physical token is interfaced with the computer terminal. By "interfaced", it is meant that the physical token interacts with the computer terminal. In the preferred version of this embodiment, the physical token is a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM 218, and is interfaced with the computer terminal by being inserted into a suitable CD-ROM or DVD ROM drive.
